

Clark: Will U.N. be a party to war crimes?

by William Jones

Returning from his week-long visit to Iraq on Feb. 10, former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark blasted the United Nations for being an "accessory in war crimes" if it doesn't demand the cessation of the bombing of Iraq. The major U.S. news media have been attempting to ignore the Clark exposé of extensive civilian casualties, although the bombing of a civilian bunker in Baghdad two days after Clark returned to the U.S., which resulted in possibly 700 civilian deaths, will tend to heighten the impact of the Clark accusations. During the time Clark was in Baghdad, there were several interviews with him broadcast on U.S. television, including a Cable News Network interview in which Clark had to correct the CNN anchorman who had distorted what Clark had just said.

In an interview with the ABC news program "Good Morning America" on Feb. 11, Clark described the damage inflicted on the civilian population. "You go to the hospitals—we visited four hospitals where there's no light, there's no water, there's no electricity, there's no heat, there's not enough medication, the wards are full of people badly damaged, the doctors are despairing, they can't even wash their hands, they're working with people with open wounds and all the rest."

In a BBC interview on Feb. 12, Clark said that the extent of civilian casualties in Iraq was "staggering" and that those responsible for the bombardments have committed "war crimes." Clark indicated that there were at least 6-7,000 civilians who had been killed in the bombings. These were figures he received from the head of the Muslim Red Crescent organization, Dr. Ibrahim Al Nouri.

Were civilians primary targets?

Clark debunked Pentagon claims about possible "collateral damage" to civilian targets during the course of the bombing of military targets. "Let me tell you," said Clark, "if there's collateral damage, it's against the military. I traveled 2,000 miles in a week, seven days. I didn't see a single damaged tank. I didn't see a single damaged or destroyed remnant of any military equipment. What I saw was taxis hit, private cars hit, public buses hit, vans hit, pickup trucks hit, grain trucks hit. That's what I saw, civilian damage."

When asked by BBC whether he accepted the coalition command's claim that individual civilians were not being targeted by the bombings, Clark shot back, "Who's talking

about throwing bombs at individuals? They're bombing water, dams, and municipal water facilities. If that's not bombing civilians, what is?" When asked by BBC whether the bombings had demoralized the Iraqi population and made them angry with Saddam Hussein, Clark responded, "From what I've seen, Saddam is more popular today than he was either on Aug. 1 or on Jan. 16. And that's talking about Iraq. What about in the rest of the Arab and Muslim world? He's much more popular there."

In the BBC interview, Clark also attacked the systematic bombing of bridges in Baghdad. "And why are they bombing bridges in Baghdad? What military purpose does that have? That's like bombing a bridge in a city like London or Paris," Clark said.

In a press conference before the United Nations Correspondents Association on Feb. 12, Clark indicated that, according to the Red Crescent, 3,000 more infants have died since Nov. 1 than would have died normally, due to the lack of proper baby food and to the fact that homemade substitutes are contaminated by polluted water. "In my judgment as a lawyer," said Clark, "this violates the Hague Convention, the Nuremberg Charter, and every law of armed conflict which restrains violence directed at noncombatants. This is the clearest violation."

Demand for investigative commission

Clark also had video footage of the damage inflicted in Baghdad and Basra, which he was able to visit. Clark said he had urged, in a letter to U.N. Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, that an investigative commission be sent immediately to Iraq to examine civilian death and destruction, and called for the immediate cessation of all bombing of Iraq except for clearly defined military concentrations in southern Iraq near the Kuwaiti border. "If this is not done," warned Clark, "then the United Nations, which was created to end the scourge of war, will be implicated as an accessory in war crimes, that if the U.N. doesn't demand the cessation of this bombing it is an accessory to war crimes."

Clark also attacked U.S. refusal to at any point enter into negotiations, and the U.N.'s passive acceptance of that refusal. "The U.N.'s consideration of the matter . . . overlooked Chapter 6, which provides for settlement of disputes contemplating every means known in human history, which includes mediation, arbitration, and just plain old talking." With regard to Bush's motivation in the war, Clark said, "He wants to be the world policeman and to be a wartime President. From day one I saw no proposal from Bush other than demanding complete giving in."

The Clark revelations could boost the impeachment resolution submitted on Jan. 15 by Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.). Article 3 accuses Bush of conspiring "to engage in a massive war against Iraq, employing methods of mass destruction that will result in the killing of tens of thousands of civilians, many of whom will be children."